



PRESS RELEASE

IRISH LIFE TO INVEST €1 MILLION IN GAA HEALTHY CLUB INITIATIVE

- **Three year commitment to facilitate nationwide roll-out of scheme**
- **Minister Varadkar praises project for empowering clubs and communities to become champions of their own health bringing Healthy Ireland ideals to life**
- **First major Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment to embrace GAA activities**

Dublin, 14 January, 2015:

Irish Life is to invest €1million in the GAA's Healthy Club Project.

The commitment will greatly enhance the project's positive influence on the health and wellbeing of GAA clubs, their members, and the communities they serve. The investment has been made as part of Irish Life's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme to celebrate the company's 75th anniversary of business in Ireland.

The Healthy Club Project is one of the GAA's flagship community initiatives and is being rolled out in partnership with the Irish health sector, including Healthy Ireland, the HSE, and the National Office for Suicide Prevention. The initial commitment by Irish Life is for a three year period which will see the scheme move from its current pilot stage to a phased national roll-out making it available to clubs across the 32 counties.

Details of the Irish Life investment were announced at a briefing held in Croke Park on Wednesday, 14 January, 2015. The Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar, TD, was guest of honour at the announcement along with An Uachtarán Cumann Luthchleas Gael, Liam O'Neill, and Dr. Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health.

The Healthy Club Project was initially launched in March 2013 with seed capital and professional support provided by the HSE. 18 clubs were selected to participate in the two-year pilot phase which will conclude in March. It is being independently evaluated by a team from Waterford IT's Centre for Health Behaviour Research. Findings from their one-year interim report have proven very positive with the participating clubs offering interventions across a wide variety of topics including physical

activity, mental health, health screening, bullying, diet and nutrition, inclusion and community outreach, drug and alcohol awareness, life skill and personal development, anti-smoking, facilities development, and engagement of older community members.

While much of their important work goes unrecognised outside their own membership and communities, many of the pilot 'Healthy Clubs' are already gaining recognition for their efforts. St. Colmcille's GAA was awarded REHAB Community group of the year for Meath while Castleblayney Faughs picked up the same accolade in Monaghan as well as being announced Ulster Club of the Year 2014. The St. Finbarr's and Midleton clubs were awarded joint first place in the national Health Management Institute awards 2014 by the Minister for Health for their ground-breaking 'Cork Beats Stress' programme rolled out with the HSE Psychological services which benefitted hundreds of people in their catchment areas. The initiative has also received recognition for its potential to deliver health ownership back to communities at European level.

Minister for Health Leo Varadkar welcomed the announcement of the investment by Irish Life in the GAA's Healthy Club Project: "The GAA is a phenomenal organisation present in every parish in Ireland with a reach into all sectors of society. It already makes an enormous contribution to the nation's health and wellbeing. I am delighted that they are willing now to do even more. These days we all know how important it is to look after our and mental and physical fitness, so it's great to see the Healthy Clubs project going nationwide. The pilot stage involving 18 clubs has already been a big success. It's encouraging to see the GAA, with its long tradition of games and exercise, acknowledging the need to look after the mind as well as the body. I would urge communities across Ireland to get involved and see how they can benefit. It also fits in really well with the Government's own Healthy Ireland initiative, which wants people to stay well and to feel well. I particularly want to pay tribute to the volunteers who are making this project work."

Speaking about the initiative, Bill Kyle, chief executive, Irish Life, said that he hoped that this would be the first step on a long journey in partnership with both the GAA and Healthy Ireland. He spoke of the overall philosophy of Great-West Lifeco, Irish Life's parent company, which believes that it has a responsibility to put something back into the communities that made it successful in the first place.

"As Irish Life celebrates 75 years of business in Ireland, we set out to find a project where our financial involvement would make a real difference and our staff would have an opportunity to contribute their time and talent.

"I believe in the GAA's Healthy Club initiative we have found such a project. A measure of the project is that the GAA and Healthy Ireland are fully committed to rolling it out in every community in the country. We are delighted to be in a position to make that a reality in a far shorter timeframe than might otherwise have been possible."

"The GAA is already a significant player in the health of the country by virtue of its games and I believe the Healthy Club initiative will bring a totally new dimension to the organisation's involvement in health. The initiative tackles health in its broadest possible definition and uses the unique medium of the GAA clubs to disseminate healthcare programmes and information to the wider community."

An Uachtarán CLG, Liam O'Neill, said: "The health and wellbeing of our members is core GAA business. Irish Life's commitment to the Healthy Club project will help us grow that work at a much greater pace and scope than would otherwise have been possible while our on-going partnership with the HSE and the National Office for Suicide Prevention allows us access to resources, knowledge and expertise, with both supplying professionals, who are also GAA members, to our new National health & Wellbeing Committee.

"I couldn't be more enthused by today's announcement and we look forward to developing a long and lasting partnership with Irish Life that will greatly benefit GAA members and Irish communities everywhere. Finally I would like to commend the clubs that were involved in Phase 1 for the incredible work they have put into this project to date."

Biddy O'Neill, HSE Health Promotion and chair of the Healthy Club Steering Committee, said: "The HSE believes in supporting clubs and communities in taking control of their wellbeing and we are committed to assisting the GAA Healthy Club Project in achieving this. This investment will allow the HSE's existing commitment in the project go even further and we are delighted to welcome Irish life into this successful partnership."

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**For further queries contact GAA Community & Health Manager Colin Regan
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Editors' notes:

GAA clubs all over the world offer health enhancing opportunities for their members and communities. Phase 1 of the GAA Healthy Club Project was launched by an Uachtarán CLG, Liam Ó Néill, and Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health, Dr. Tony Holohan, in March 2013, to develop a model that would offer greater support and sustainability to this work. Both the HSE and the National Office for Suicide Prevention offered seed capital via a Service Line Agreement to assist the GAA's Community & Health section in resourcing and developing the project.

Its principles are based on the World Health Organisation's 'settings approach' to sustainable health promotion offering. The model assists clubs in better understanding how they can proactively support their members' health and wellbeing under four headings: policies, environment (physical and cultural), partnerships, and programmes.

The interim report by the independent evaluation team from Waterford IT's Centre for Health Behaviour Research revealed that in total, 79 initiatives over two years were planned across the 16 clubs who completed and submitted their action plans to the GAA's Community and Health team. The majority (n=69) were combined initiatives incorporating the delivery of a programme with some

level of partnership with a relevant local or national entity such as the Health Service Executive (HSE), Local Sports Partnership (LSP), Foróige and local health professionals or community groups.

Areas covered included physical activity, mental health, health screening, bullying, diet and nutrition, inclusion and community outreach, drug and alcohol awareness, life skill and personal development, anti-smoking, facilities development, and engagement of older community members. The final report into Phase 1 will be published by the independent evaluation team in April 2015 and will inform the nature of the subsequent phases with details being announced later in 2015.

The Phase 1 participating clubs are as follows:

Leinster

<u>Club</u>	<u>County</u>
Annacurra	Wicklow
Thomas Davis	Dublin
St Colmcille's	Meath
St. John's Volunteers	Wexford

Connacht

<u>Club</u>	<u>County</u>
Liam Mellows Hurling Club*	Galway
Ballinamore Sean O' Heslin **	Leitrim
Eastern Harps	Sligo
Oran	Roscommon

Ulster

<u>Club</u>	<u>County</u>
St Mary's Rasharkin	Antrim
St John's Drummaquoile	Down
Culloville Blues	Armagh
Castleblayney Faughs	Monaghan

Munster

<u>Club</u>	<u>County</u>
Beaufort	Kerry
Nenagh Eire Og	Tipperary
Mungret St. Pauls	Limerick
Midleton	Cork

Mentoring Clubs***

<u>Club</u>	<u>County</u>
St. Finbarr's National Football & Hurling Club	Cork
St. Peter's CLG	Down

* Liam Mellows Club were forced to withdraw from Phase 1 due to a lack of capacity at present.

** The Ballinamore club was unable to commit to the evaluation requirements of Phase 1 but continues to work as a Healthy Club in its community.

*** The mentoring clubs were selected due to the high quality of their expression of interests and were selected to highlight what can be achieved at club level.

